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Publisher: Routledge

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New Political Science

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cnps20>

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Published online: 30 Oct 2014.

To cite this article: Sanford F. Schram (2014) The Future of Higher Education and American Democracy: Introduction, *New Political Science*, 36:4, 425-437, DOI: [10.1080/07393148.2014.954805](https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2014.954805)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2014.954805>

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The Future of Higher Education and American Democracy: Introduction

Sanford F. Schram

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The economic fallout from the Great Recession of 2009 has brought a number of difficult issues to the fore. Many of them share a common root. Over the last few decades, there has been an ongoing neoliberalization of the political economy. Neoliberalism is defined variously, but one incisive definition has the marketization of the state at its core.¹ In one area after another, public policies have been restructured to operate more along market lines in order to make those programs better serve market purposes. Admittedly, conservatives led by corporate elites had, for years, focused on rolling back the welfare state. The push to roll back the welfare state has been developing ever since the New Deal of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was rolled out as a response to the Great Depression that started in 1928. Yet, by the time of the Great Society under President Lyndon Baines Johnson in the 1960s, it was clear that the roll back was going to be no simple task. After the New Deal and then the Great Society, the Keynesian countercyclical welfare state had come to be firmly embedded in the political economy. As limited as it was in its American incarnation, people had become committed to relying on the state as a backstop to the capriciousness of capitalism. In lieu of Plan A of rolling back the welfare state, conservatives eventually turned to Plan B: if you could not roll back the welfare state, the next best thing would be to marketize it—that is, restructure it not to counter the market but to make it operate more along market lines all in the name of buttressing the market.²

Neoliberalism involves blurring the boundaries between the market and the state. The state gets marketized so as to come to be more focused on buttressing market actors. For instance, the ideals implicit in social welfare policy envision it as protecting citizens by counteracting the negative effects of markets. Yet, with neoliberalism, social welfare policy now “jumps tracks” to become public programs designed to further the profitability of national firms in global markets (even if it means making citizens more economically precarious).³ Welfare programs that sheltered the unemployed and unemployable morph into

¹Wendy Brown, “Neo-Liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” *Theory & Event* 7:1 (2003); and Wendy Brown, “American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization,” *Political Theory* 34:6 (2006), pp. 690–714.

²Jamie Peck, “Zombie Neoliberalism and the Ambidexterous State,” *Theoretical Criminology* 14:1 (2010) pp. 104–110.

³Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

programs designed to push the poor into low-wage jobs. These jobs, more often than not, leave people poor but increase the profit margins of their employers, consistent with the underlying purpose of neoliberalism.⁴ Yet, neoliberalism involves much more than welfare-to-work for the poor. Plan B moves like a juggernaut, restructuring public policy in one area after another, regardless of whether liberals or conservatives are in power. Education is no exception to this powerful trend.

Education policy has proven particularly vulnerable to neoliberalization. For years, concern about the decline of the public schools suggested the need for major market-oriented reforms.⁵ These would be reforms where market actors are recruited to impose market-based solutions that would involve more economically efficient ways of delivering more market-appropriate types of education on the basis of reduced budgets. From the start, the reform agenda framed the need for education reform in a just-so crisis narrative, implying that the appropriate response was the neoliberalization of education policy.⁶ At the core of this crisis narrative was the founding assumption that the country was at risk of losing out in the global economic competition if it did not reform education so as to graduate more students with the skills demanded by the globalizing economy. The United States was “A Nation at Risk,” as the pivotal report of President Ronald Reagan’s education reform commission put it in 1983.⁷

It did not take long for specific changes to start to be implemented.⁸ The alleged failures of the schools were almost never seen as a result of declines in public funding, especially for the neediest, often nonwhite students. Instead, declines in public support were used as a pretext to turn the schools over to market actors who would impose neoliberal reforms as a way of delivering education more cheaply while often still allowing the profiteers to make money themselves. Testing was imposed on students to ensure that the system was producing the desired outcomes. The testing schemes were married to systems of market competition so the networks of schools (both public and private) would have incentives to compete in meeting the new accountability standards. Charter schools and high-stakes testing became the twin pillars of neoliberal education reform of elementary and secondary public schools. Other reforms to incentivize desired outcomes among competing schools came to include such schemes as linking teacher pay to student performance on those tests.

⁴Joe Soss, Richard C. Fording and Sanford F. Schram, *Disciplining the Poor: Neoliberal Paternalism and the Persistent Power of Race* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

⁵Private foundations, such as the Gates Foundation, the Lumina Foundation, and the Walton Family Foundation have led the campaign to promote market-based education reform. See Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

⁶Garnet Kindervater and Joe Soss, “Governing Through Crisis: How States Produce the Present in the Future Tense” (Paper prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Seattle, WA, April 17–20, 2014).

⁷*A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, National Commission on Excellence in Education, April 1983), <http://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/intro.html>.

⁸Diane Ravitch, *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America’s Public Schools* (New York: Knopf, 2012).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 made neoliberal reform of the public schools a nationwide effort supported by both the major political parties.⁹ Yet, its implementation would prove problematic. As the stakes increased, pressure grew to the point where meeting performance benchmarks became the be all and end all. Cheating scandals are matched with reductions in the quality of instruction concerning anything that is not measured by the performance standards. Nonetheless, thanks to extensive lobbying based in part on profits gleaned from the privatized system, public education now continually becomes neoliberalized in ways that have proven very profitable for some entrepreneurs, regardless of whether students are better educated.¹⁰

Higher education has not been immune to the pressures to introduce neoliberal reforms, though it is only most recently that neoliberalization in higher education has started to receive critical scrutiny.¹¹ The recent push for neoliberalizing the academy comes at a time when it is ripe for change, especially as it continues to confront growing financial pressure, particularly in the public sector.¹² Higher education has had its own particular vulnerabilities that the right could exploit by fanning the flames of anti-intellectual resentment among those already predisposed to oppose what they saw as the leftist orientation of academia. By the early 1970s, demonization of the professoriate as leftist *refuseniks* facilitated the agenda to retrench funding for higher education.¹³ The resulting cutbacks in public funding, especially to state universities, led to a variety of debilitating changes: increases in tuition, growing student debt, more students combining working and schooling, declining graduation rates for minorities and low-income students, increased reliance on adjuncts and temporary faculty, and most recently, growing interest in mass processing of students via online instruction.

Under-funded public colleges and universities, like the elementary and secondary public schools before them, have come under the most pressure to respond to lack of funding. Again, the preferred neoliberal response has been to turn to market-based solutions. The thinking is that these reforms can turn education into a marketable product at reduced cost. A tipping point seems to have been reached where US institutions of higher learning are now prioritizing cost-efficiency in the provision of education as a commodity at the expense of promoting the liberal learning essential to fostering a democratic citizenry. Neoliberalism becomes its own vicious cycle. The institutions of higher education are not just mimicking the neoliberal responses of the elementary and secondary schools; they are also affected by the neoliberal reforms occurring at those levels. The pressures on institutions of higher education are compounded by the crisis in

⁹ Jesse Hessler Rhodes, "Progressive Policy Making in a Conservative Age? Civil Rights and the Politics of Federal Education Standards, Testing, and Accountability," *Perspectives on Politics* 9:3 (2011), pp. 519–544; and Jesse Rhodes, *An Education in Politics: The Origins and Evolution of No Child Left Behind* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

¹⁰ Ravitch, *Reign of Error*, Chapter 32.

¹¹ Suzanne Mettler, *Degrees of Inequality: How the Politics of Higher Education Sabotaged the American Dream* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

¹² Ellen Schrecker, *The Lost Soul of Higher Education: Corporatization, the Assault on Academic Freedom, and the End of the American University* (New York: New Press, 2010).

¹³ Henry A. Giroux, "Higher Education Under Siege: Implications for Public Intellectuals," *NEA Higher Education Journal* (Fall 2006), pp. 63–78.

elementary and secondary public education because declining state support has made it more difficult for lower-income students, especially minorities, to get the education they need to even qualify to attend college. While many serious questions arise once we begin to examine what is happening in higher education today, one particularly critical question concerns the implications of these changes on the relationship of education to as yet still unrealized democratic ideals.¹⁴ The articles in this Special Issue of *New Political Science* address particular aspects of the crisis in higher education with attention to its implications for American democracy. In this introduction, I first present an overview of the developments in higher education and then provide a summary of the articles that follow.

Neoliberalizing Higher Education

When President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education released *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, the push for reform was focused primarily on elementary and secondary education.¹⁵ Reform of higher education was, however, coming into focus. The introduction of the report indicated:

The Commission's charter directed it to pay particular attention to teenage youth, and we have done so largely by focusing on high schools. Selective attention was given to the formative years spent in elementary schools, to higher education, and to vocational and technical programs. We refer those interested in the need for similar reform in higher education to the recent report of the American Council on Education, *To Strengthen the Quality of Higher Education*.¹⁶

At the time, reform of higher education along the same neoliberal lines as elementary and secondary education was not a topic of widespread public discussion. Yet, that would change and today the neoliberalization of higher education is more widely discussed as reform works its way across the higher education landscape. And as that happens, the criticisms are starting to accumulate.¹⁷

The crisis narrative championed by the reformers defined education in highly economic terms. The value of getting an education was now more than before measured in its ability to enhance the students' human capital that makes them employable in the globalizing economy. Technical skills that employers valued took precedence over the value of education in other respects, for example as in becoming a critical-minded, thoughtful citizen who could help the country better meet its democratic ideals. The idea that mass higher education could produce a more critically minded democratic citizenry is an old one that was only starting to be realized in the post-World War II era. But now the idea of higher education propelling the US to a brighter democratic future is fading fast in the face of neoliberalization.¹⁸

¹⁴ In particular, see Harry Boyte (ed.), *Democracy's Education: Public Work, Citizenship, and the Future of Colleges and Universities* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2014).

¹⁵ US Department of Education, National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ See Henry Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2014).

¹⁸ See Harry Boyte, "Higher Education and Rising Inequality," *Huffington Post*, July 19, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/harry-boyte/higher-education-and-rising-inequality_b_5602158.html.

One result of this shift in the value of a post-secondary education was the proliferation of vocational and technical training schools which came to be funded largely by federally-funded loans to students. Traditional colleges and universities also adjusted to the demands for change offering more career-oriented programs. The overall results have not been pretty. For instance, most students who attend for-profit colleges and universities do not graduate with jobs in their chosen fields at salaries high enough to enable them to pay off their loans.¹⁹ Actually, many students at these schools never graduate. Nonetheless, the growing reliance on federally-funded student loans by the for-profits has been a major driver in making student debt the largest form of debt across the country, crowding out home mortgages and, as a result, slowing down economic recovery.²⁰ Yet, for-profit colleges and universities continue to attract students, often with false advertising and by still effectively resisting strict governmental regulation, using their profits to effectively lobby Congress.

The for-profits are heavily dependent on federally-funded student loans to sustain their operations. Their promises to provide vocationally-oriented education have attracted students who overwhelmingly finance their studies via federally-funded student loans. They represent a prime example of how neoliberalism involves blurring the boundaries of the state and the market, where education policy gets marketized and market actors are state subsidized.

The continued success of the for-profits in receiving federal support without sufficient federal oversight actually points to a key irony of neoliberalism. In fact neoliberal failure may not be failure at all because much of the marketization of education in recent years seems designed to get people to comply with market forces rather than to resist them.²¹ If students fail or if a chosen school fails them, as market actors they must accept responsibility for their bad choices and work to improve their market participation in the future. This logic has spread from charter schools and for-profit colleges and universities and eventually to public schools and private non-profit colleges and universities. They now all increasingly lean toward refashioning the curriculum to attract students with promises of opportunities to learn skills directly related to specific careers.²² Students must accept responsibility for their education choices, most especially with the need to continue to pay off their student loans even if their education leaves them without a career that can finance repayment. Education is now more than ever a commodity that one buys. If it fails to improve your human capital in the form of commodifiable skills, that is a burden you must bear on your own. This neoliberal logic makes education a risky business for students as individual consumers even as it becomes less of an asset for society as a whole. The bottom line is that the commodification of education continues apace irrespective of effects for citizenship and democracy. The marketization of education seems to be a machine that now goes by itself.

¹⁹ For a searing indictment of the rise of for-profit colleges and universities, see Mettler, *Inequalities of Degrees*, pp. 87–110.

²⁰ Andrew Ross, *Creditocracy: And the Case for Debt Refusal* (New York: OR Books, 2014), Chapter 3.

²¹ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²² Wesley Shumar, *College for Sale: A Critique of the Commodification of Higher Education* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

In response to the growing concern about students not being able to convert their schooling into decent paying jobs, the Obama administration has proposed tying federal aid to outcome measures such as graduation rates.²³ Yet, this is just another example of using neoliberal reforms to address the failures of neoliberalism. Frequently, we see these performance measurement schemes get repudiated only to be replaced by more ambitious measurement regimes. Performance measurement becomes a “hydra-headed monster” that comes back stronger after each beheading.²⁴ Further, the imposition of performance standards is likely to create more perverse measurement schemes that have counter-productive effects like we have seen with “high-stakes testing” and charter schools that focus on improving scores without necessarily ensuring students get a well-rounded education. The result is that the measurement tail comes to wag the program implementation dog.

There is then risk of a neoliberal means–ends inversion that comes from the instrumentalization of performance measurement.²⁵ With a statistical benchmark hanging over program administrators, inevitably there is the concern that hitting the target must be given priority, even at the expense of other important programmatic considerations. If failure to hit the performance target means adverse actions will be taken against the program, including reductions in funding, or worse, termination of the program, then the performance management benchmarks not only inform the decision-making of education administrators, but can become an overriding preoccupation.

Neoliberal systems of measurement are still creating measurement panic in public elementary and secondary education today and not just among competing charter schools that vie to get their contracts renewed by local school districts. Even as high-stakes testing gets thoroughly criticized, the pressure now grows to extend this logic in deciding the allocation of federal funding to colleges and universities. While tracking graduation rates is important, tying funding to them as the Obama administration has proposed might just produce more neoliberal failure of the performance measurement kind. The hydra-headed monster of performance management has nine lives and like other neoliberal zombies it can keep on keeping on, long after it should have been declared dead.

The failures of neoliberal higher education reform include growing inequities. A major debate among critics is about neoliberalism’s failure in reducing the growing inequalities of recent decades. We need to consider the possibility that neoliberalism’s failures could well be intentional rather than unintentional results of neoliberal policies and practices designed to redistribute resources toward the most aggressive market actors.²⁶ Given the role education plays in determining the economic prospects of so many, this debate undoubtedly has direct relevance for assessing education reform in the current era.

²³Tamar Lewin, “Obama’s Plan Aims to Lower Cost of College,” *New York Times*, August 22, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/22/education/obamas-plan-aims-to-lower-cost-of-college.html?_r=0 > .

²⁴Beryl A. Radin, “The Government and Performance Review Act (GPRA): Hydra-Headed Monster or Flexible Management Tool?” *Public Administration Review* 58:4 (1988), pp. 307–317.

²⁵On administrative policy feedback, see Joe Soss and Donald P. Moynihan, “Feedback and the Politics of Administration,” *Public Administration Review* 74:3 (2014), pp. 320–322.

²⁶See Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, p. 98.

At one level, it is unremarkable that neoliberalism generates inequality. Neoliberalism is centrally about marketization; and markets have evolved to be about creating competitions with winners and losers. Under neoliberalism, each person is seen as having primary responsibility to enhance his or her own human capital. If you took on massive amounts of debt to finance your education but cannot now get a decent job to pay off your student loans, then that is also on you as a failed market actor. Neoliberal logic is unimpressed with the record amounts of student debt and campaigns for debt forgiveness continue to waver politically. Yet, it would seem that if it were not for the hegemony of the neoliberal perspective, the student debt crisis would receive more serious political discussion.

Student debt is but the tip of a very deep iceberg, as Chris Maisano has noted.²⁷ By 2012, student loan debt became the largest form of all debt, exceeding credit card, housing and medical debt, and totaling approximately one trillion dollars. The main reason for increased debt is the rising cost of tuition and fees that have more than doubled since 2000. The ongoing underfunding of public colleges and universities is the main cause of these increases. Between 1990 and 2010, real funding per public full-time enrolled student declined by over 26%. Over the same period, tuition and fees at four-year public colleges and universities rose by approximately 113% while the price of public two-year colleges increased by 71%. With families' incomes stagnating for over thirty years, students increasingly turned to loans to finance their education. Maisano notes: "According to the Department of Education, 45% of 1992–1993 graduates borrowed money from federal or private sources; today, at least two-thirds of graduates enter the workforce with educational debt."²⁸

The problem of what Maisano and others have called "debt overhang" weighs heavily on students after their schooling ends, increasingly in recent decades.²⁹ One main reason is the persistence of wage stagnation. Workers with Bachelor's degrees aged twenty-five to thirty-four saw their earnings decline 15% over the last decade. At the same time, student debt on average increased by 24%. Yet unlike other forms of debt, student loans stay with you and cannot be erased by conventional bankruptcy claims. When borrowers default on student loans, they face wage garnishment, loss of tax refunds, and the withholding of future Social Security payments and other penalties.

Under these neoliberal conditions, it is not at all surprising, and in fact it is to be expected, that education will begin to resemble a rigged lottery that ends up creating what Suzanne Mettler has called "degrees of inequality."³⁰ While students from the wealthiest families can purchase highly marketable degrees, only the most fortunate low-income students who somehow manage to qualify for sufficient financial backing at elite schools are likely to be able to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by graduating from college. The rest, all too predictably, end up facing the possibility that their education translates into less

²⁷ The figures reported in this paragraph are from Chris Maisano, "The Soul of Student Debt," *Jacobin* 9 (2012).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ The figures reported are from *ibid.* Also see Ross, *Creditocracy*, Chapter 3.

³⁰ Mettler, *Degrees of Inequality*.

than a sure road to the middle class or worse, their student loans weigh them down so much they remain mired in poverty.

Increasingly we are seeing evidence that neoliberal marketizing reforms are leading to an education system that creates pathways to economic success for some while disserving others who are seeking to advance educationally. This is especially apparent in the post-secondary market. At one end, many of the students attending for-profit colleges end up with massive debt and no real job prospects. Students attending under-funded public colleges also are weighed down with student loans and face grim employment prospects as well. In fact, there is now growing evidence that seeking a college degree continues to be a safe financial investment but only for those students who attend the better, often exclusive private, non-profit colleges and other elite universities.³¹

The public universities are increasingly confronting budget cuts as states fail to support them at prior levels. The anti-tax movement and the hollowing out of the welfare state over time have forced state universities to seek alternative sources of funding. Among public colleges and universities, state and local funding per student decreased only 2–4% in 2011—substantially lower than the 6–15% declines observed during the Great Recession. Nonetheless, state and local support reached a decade low in 2011, averaging about six to eight thousand dollars per student at public four-year colleges and universities.³²

As a result, students at public colleges and universities now pay 50–60% of the cost of their education—an eighteen to twenty-two percentage point increase for 2001–2011.³³ For the same period, at community colleges, student costs rose by fifteen percentage points, amounting to 38% of their total educational costs. Overall, increases in the student share of costs at public institutions grew for the decade between 54 and 62% on average. Increases in tuition have led students to borrow more money but also work more while attending school and the results indicate declining performance.³⁴ Neoliberalization results in more students learning less while shouldering more of the costs.

With the shift away from public support, increasingly state funding is seen as “seed money” that helps finance neoliberal efforts to attract financing from investors via bond markets (sometimes more successfully than others).³⁵ The degrees of inequality continue to mount under neoliberalism’s marketization of education. With declines in public support, inequalities emerge not just between public and private schools but also among the public universities in the rates at which they can attract private funding.

In the face of this pell-mell rush to procure financing, inequalities mount within the ranks of the professoriate as well. Increasingly the under-funded public colleges and universities have accelerated the ongoing trend toward creating a casualized workforce of under-paid adjunct faculty to provide instruction for a

³¹ *Ibid.*, 30–39.

³² Donna M. Desrochers and Steven Hurlburt, *Trends in College Spending: 2001–2011: A Delta Data Update* (Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research, 2014), p. 6.

³³ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁴ Richard Arum and Josipa Roska, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

³⁵ Bill Graves, “The Rise and Fall of Richard Lariviere, University of Oregon President, Fired on Monday,” *The Oregonian*, December 3, 2011, http://www.oregonlive.com/education/index.ssf/2011/12/the_rise_and_fall_of_richard_l.html>.

growing majority of all classes being taught at these institutions. Underpaid, most often without basic health or pension benefits, many of these adjuncts are graduate students or former graduate students with no real prospects of securing a permanent faculty appointment. A class division grows among the ranks of the faculty adding to the degrees of inequality wrought by the neoliberalization of higher education. A recent report from Democrats in the US House of Representatives in 2014 noted:

The post-secondary academic workforce has undergone a remarkable change over the last several decades. The tenure-track college professor with a stable salary, firmly grounded in the middle or upper-middle class, is becoming rare. Taking her place is the contingent faculty: non-tenure-track teachers, such as part-time adjuncts or graduate instructors, with no job security from one semester to the next, working at a piece rate with few or no benefits across multiple workplaces, and far too often struggling to make ends meet. In 1970, adjuncts made up 20 percent of all higher education faculty. Today, they represent half.³⁶

The change is even more drastic depending on how you count. Over 70% of all faculty are non-tenure track.³⁷ Yet, a professoriate of temporary instructors is evidently still not enough to balance the under-funded budgets of public colleges and universities. As a result, the growing ranks of administrators who have been hired to manage the transformed faculty are increasingly pushing use of the internet to deliver instruction.³⁸ Online instruction and other innovations are being developed, often relying on private corporate providers for content.³⁹ The result is yet another neoliberal market-based practice to introduce other forms of inequality between students in terms of how they take courses, and between instructors in terms of whether they are a featured lecturer or just an under-paid teaching assistant.

These changes had been developing before the Great Recession and include private colleges and universities as well as public ones. With the tumultuous changes to higher education today, it is difficult to predict whether cherished ideals of ensuring access to a decent education for all can be sustained. Also in doubt is whether education in the future can continue to be a force that works to promote both equality and democracy. Instead, it may be moving to being an agent for generating greater inequality while ignoring its role in helping educate the next generation to be effective democratic citizens.

The concern for democracy is not new but in the age of neoliberalism is at risk of being seen as an anachronistic extravagance.⁴⁰ Education is supposed to be not

³⁶ US House of Representatives, Committee on Education and the Workforce, Democratic Staff, *The Just-in-Time Professor: A Staff Report Summarizing eForum Responses on the Working Conditions of Contingent Faculty in Higher Education* (Washington, DC: January 2014), <http://democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/sites/democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/files/documents/1.24.14-AdjunctEforumReport.pdf>> .

³⁷ Adrianna Kezar, "Changing Faculty Workload Models," *TIAA-CREF Institute*, November, 2013, <https://www.tiaa-crefinstitute.org/public/pdf/changing-faculty-workforce-models.pdf>> .

³⁸ Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why it Matters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 192–202.

³⁹ "Major Players in the MOOC Universe," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 22, 2014, <http://chronicle.com/article/Major-Players-in-the-MOOC/138817/?cid=wc> .

⁴⁰ Boyte, "Higher Education and Rising Inequality."

just for us individually but also for society collectively so as to help sustain democracy. While never fully realized in practice, the post-World War II period saw great strides in moving forward toward realizing that quintessentially American ideal. But that was before neoliberalism. Now the US is the home of marketized education, turning it into a commodity that individuals consume exclusively for the enhancement of each person's human capital. Yet, even if that promise of enhanced human capital is increasingly not able to translate into decent paying jobs, the prevalence of neoliberal market logic in education it seems has as yet to peak.

In the balance hangs the relationship between higher education and democracy. If the market logic of neoliberalism continues to work its way to ascendance in higher education, increasingly a college education will only be valued strictly in terms of its commodifiability. Education will be assessed strictly in terms of its ability to enhance human capital that can be bought and sold on global labor markets. Any and all education that does not directly contribute to that process of commodification will be relegated to being seen as a luxury that cash-strapped colleges and universities can ill afford. The process of neoliberalization makes education for promoting a democratic citizenry all the more precarious, vulnerable to further diminution and marginalization if not outright total elimination. The dream of mass higher education to produce a more critically minded democratic citizenry will remain further from reach.

The consequences of this financial situation in higher education today are profoundly political. As Tayyab Mahmud has pointed out, debt imposes discipline on the debtors.⁴¹ For instance, schools which have mortgaged their futures to bondholders will be beholden to their agendas. And students weighed down by debt are not likely to feel they have the luxury to study that which makes them a critically minded citizen if that does not also provide a path to professional employment that can pay off their loans. As Andrew Ross notes:

[T]he larger threat is to the workings of an operational democracy. A crushing debt burden stifles our capacity to think freely, act conscientiously and fulfill our democratic responsibilities. Too many young people now feel their future has been foreclosed before they have entered full adulthood. And, given the creditors' goal of prolonging debt service to the grave, the burden of repayment is shifting disproportionately toward the elderly (many of whom now are routinely asked to cosign student loans). Democracies don't survive well without a functional middle class or a citizenry endowed with an optional political imagination, and the test of a humane one is how it treats seniors when they outlast their capacity to earn a living wage.⁴²

Equally worrisome is the prospect that an increasingly causalized faculty, overwhelmingly composed of adjunct faculty, who keep their jobs based on how well student-consumers prefer their courses, is not likely to serve as a strong bulwark against the erosion of a curriculum designed to sustain the education-democracy relationship. Yet, it could be that the faculty are the last line of defense against the deleterious effects of the neoliberalization of higher education. Their

⁴¹ Tayyab Mahmud, "Debt and Discipline," *American Quarterly* 64:3 (2012), pp. 469–494.

⁴² Andrew Ross, "Creditocracy or Democracy?" *Aljazeera America*, May 10, 2014, <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/5/credit-card-debtclassoccupycreditocracy.html>.

ability to find the wherewithal to rise up and resist neoliberalization may be the most crucial piece any successful movement to get beyond neoliberalization to a better future for higher education.⁴³ Recent successes in organizing adjuncts offer a glimmer of hope but whether those successes can lead to more is an open question.⁴⁴

The Articles That Follow

The articles that follow help fill out this skeletal picture of the crisis of higher education today and its implications for democracy. Several provide historical or theoretical perspectives, others more empirical detail and a few poignant case studies. Together we get a much richer portrait of what the crisis looks like today.

The first article, "*Realpolitik* in the American University: Charles A. Beard and the Problem of Academic Repression," is by Clyde W. Barrow. This article provides an important historical perspective on the current situation by reminding us about the real threats to academic freedom that come when administrators start to impose their reforms on the academy. The implications for democracy are made palpable in this stirring tale about the fight to maintain academic freedom in the corporatized academy as represented in the career of the legendary historian Charles Beard.

The second article "From *E Pluribus Unum* to *Caveat Emptor*: How Neoliberal Policies are Capturing and Dismantling the Liberal University" is by Steven Ward and takes a more theoretical approach to provide deep background on the neoliberalism behind the current wave of reforms sweeping over the academy. The third article by Tracy Lightcap, "Academic Governance and Democratic Processes: The Entrepreneurial Model and Its Discontents" builds on Ward's article to explore in-depth how neoliberalism is transforming the model of academic governance. The Lightcap article provides a richly detailed case study of the debacle at the University of Virginia in 2012 that involved the eventual reinstatement of its president over this very issue. Lightcap draws out important lessons on how the push to neoliberalize the university poses real threats to collegial decision-making and academic freedom. The fourth article is by Jacob Segal and is entitled "Ideology and the Reform of Public Higher Education." It draws on the thinking of the conservative philosopher Michael Oakeshott to offer a penetrating critique of the productivist ethic operating at the base of neoliberalism. Segal shows the affinities between Oakeshott's perspective and contemporary poststructuralists who also highlight the debilitating anti-democratic consequences of the neoliberalization of education.

In "Resisting the Exploitation of Contingent Faculty Labor in the Neoliberal University: The Challenge of Building Solidarity between Tenured and Non-Tenured Faculty," Joseph Schwartz poses the critical question about faculty resistance to neoliberalization. The article explores why most tenured faculty "naturalize" neoliberalism's deterioration of the academic labor market as inevitable and why they fail to resist it in a concerted manner. Schwartz concludes

⁴³ Ginsberg, *The Fall of the Faculty*, pp. 201–220.

⁴⁴ Tamar Lewin, "More College Adjuncts See Strength in Union Numbers," *New York Times*, December 4, 2013, < http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/04/us/more-college-adjuncts-see-strength-in-union-numbers.html?pagewanted=all&_r;=0 > .

with an argument on why tenured faculty must make alliances with the adjuncts in the name of salvaging higher education and its relationship to democracy. Vincent Tirelli's article "Contingent Academic Labor Against Neoliberalism" suggests that the extensive use of contingent academic labor contributes to the reproduction of social class stratification, though not without contradictions. Tirelli argues that organizing by contingent academic labor activists is a vital component in the fight for higher education and democracy that is now unfolding in real time.

Seaton Patrick Tarrant and Leslie Paul Thiele in "The Web We Weave: Online Education and Democratic Prospects" discuss the pedagogical implications of online education with special attention to its implications for democracy. Drawing on the thinking of the great philosopher of democracy John Dewey, Tarrant and Thiele argue that while citizenship education may be facilitated by digital technology, it also demands pedagogy of a more traditional sort, one characterized by embodied, experiential interactions between teachers and students. They employ theories of pedagogy, democratic theory, evolutionary psychology and neuroscience to underline the crucial importance of these embodied, experiential interactions and their relationship to the challenge of sustaining democracy in our times. The threat of neoliberal reforms that rely on online instruction is effectively underscored in the process. Clyde Wilcox, JoVita Wells, Georges Haddad, and Judith K. Wilcox provide a poignant case study in that regard in "The Changing Democratic Functions of Historically Black Colleges and Universities." They show how neoliberalization is not just a threat to liberal arts education; they go further to highlight how neoliberalization will affect historically black colleges and universities in ways that will be especially detrimental in fulfilling their mission to enable African American students to join the ranks of leadership among a critically-minded democratic citizenry.

Douglas A. Medina's "Open Admission and the Imposition of Tuition at the City University of New York, 1969–1976: A Political Economic Case Study for Understanding the Current Crisis in Higher Education" provides a political-economic analysis of how the City University of New York came to lose open admissions and develop a schedule for tuition increases. Medina highlights how this shift is associated with a vocationalized curriculum that better serves corporate needs. The article "Lowering the Basement Floor: From Community Colleges to the For-Profit Revolution" by Brian Caterino follows nicely by looking critically at the underside of for-profits today. He focuses on how they have outflanked community colleges and as a result have accelerated the vocationalization of higher education for the low-income students who predominate in these institutions. Caterino's analysis ends with a stirring defense of liberal arts education for these students.

George Ehrhardt next addresses a neglected question in "Academic Conservatives and the Future of Higher Education" when he asks what role conservatives might play in helping us make sense of and respond to the neoliberal challenge to higher education. Rather than focus on their policy recommendations, Ehrhardt examines how academic conservatives argue for the same goals as their progressive counterparts: a strong program of liberal arts, critical thinking, and access to education for diverse student populations. The analysis is not intended to persuade readers of the conservative arguments'

accuracy, rather to demonstrate points of similarity and reveal potential allies in the face of outside hostility.

Last, Romand Coles in “Transforming the Game: Democratizing the Publicness of Higher Education and Commonwealth in Neoliberal Times” suggests that neoliberalism should be understood as a game-transformative set of practices. Each move is not only to gain the upper hand in the established game, but rather to repeatedly change the basic configuration of the game itself to further enhance the power to structure future decision-making. Coles argues that progressive activists need to do more than simply resist. They need to rejuvenate the mutually supportive relationships between public higher education and democracy. This includes enacting a radically democratic pedagogy that expands the meaning of publicness and publics. The article explores Northern Arizona University’s Action Research Teams initiative as a case study that prefigures this possibility.

All of these articles make important contributions to this most pressing issue. In the process they create important resources for students, faculty, citizens, and policymakers who want to find ways to address contemporary threats to the higher education–democracy connection. We should read them closely on that basis and begin to engage in concerted action. Now, before it is too late. If we allow neoliberalism to further undermine the relationship between higher education and democracy, there may well come a time when it will be too late to overturn its worst effects.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks Leonard Feldman, Nancy Love, Mark Mattern, Joe Soss, and John Wallach for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

Notes on contributor

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